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Quiet Days and Retreats



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Quiet Days & Retreats:

being

some thoughts on their observance.

BY THE REV.
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PREFACE.

THE following remarks are intended to deal with a difficulty which is felt by many who are called upon to conduct Quiet Days, and are submitted with all humility to the kind consideration of those who take an interest in these forms of devotion.

W. C. E. N.

3, AMEN COURT,

June 20th, 1894.

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CHAPTER I.

THE great Catholic movement which by the good Providence of GOD has transformed the Church of England in the latter half of this century has been called upon to face the usual difficulties which Church history shows to be almost inevitable accompaniments of a revived spirituality. At first there is a keen opposition, an age of martyrs, intolerant opposition, and foolish suspicion, followed by an age of toleration, favour, and almost universal acceptance. In the first, enthusiasm runs high, the division into opposing camps is sharper. Profession, if it is made at all, is made in full view of the cost, and with earnestness and deliberation. In the second, the dividing barrier has become relaxed ; men are impelled by fashion rather than conviction, and a half-hearted neutrality blunts the sharp edges of orthodoxy, while the movement gains

in extensiveness what it loses in intensity. It has long been an unpleasant phenomenon that ritual and the æstheticism of devotion, in becoming popularised, have, in many cases, ceased to carry doctrine with them. It is also fast becoming evident that Retreats and Quiet Days are, while losing the suspicious character which long clung to them, and ceasing to be the badge of a party, also beginning to lose their strictness, and to fail in their purpose. People are going to Retreats and Quiet Days because it is the fashion, not because they want a time of quiet or retreat, or with any very definite idea of what to do with such a time, if they enter into it.

The object of these pages is to recall people in a very simple way to the first principles which underlie that form of devotion known as a Retreat or Quiet Day. To show how such times can profitably be spent, and to act as a humble protest against any such relaxation of their methods which would rob them of their strictness, or deprive them of their real helpfulness.

Now, the motives which have impelled people to enter retreats, and to pass certain days in quietness, are obviously good, and much to be encouraged. In an age of rush and excitement like the present there is more need than ever there was for such pauses in life. The clerical life especially is an almost unceasing giving out, with a very slight taking in, with the inevitable result of officialism, perfunctory work, shallow sermons, and a cold formalism, which will rush in like a flood, unless a man is constantly on his guard. If we look at the perfect life of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, there we have the very highest authority for such retirement. Thirty years of quiet and three of ministerial work, is the proportion which first arrests our attention. A forty days' seclusion in the wilderness is the prelude to His battle with Satan; whole nights spent on the mountain-top in retirement and prayer, and Gethsemane before Calvary, will readily occur to us, as all parts of the same system. The lives of Old Testament saints, such as Moses and Elijah, or of

New Testament saints, such as St. Paul, will exhibit the same phenomena ; while the nature of things and ordinary experience will suggest the same course. It is necessary sometimes to sharpen the instrument which has become blunted with much work. The ships which have been cruising have from time to time to put into dock, to get rid of the accretions and the foulness which their very activity has brought to them. The express train as it steams into the station after a long run, has to be carefully tapped to see if anything has fallen out of gear, or any strain impaired its stability, so as to render it unfit for further work. The artist steps back from time to time to see whether the conception of his genius is growing aright on the canvas. So it is with life, the more busy the life the more important the work, the more we need times of quiet, the more we need to study the ideal which we have put before us, and correct the copy.

It will be obvious, then, that a retreat must be entered on in satisfaction of a real want,

not in obedience to a call of fashion, or to set a good example, or because others wish it, or others do it. It must be a complete withdrawal for the time being from the excitement of society or the occupation of work. It must be a standing back, a going into the wilderness. If it is necessary that communication should be kept up by letters with the work we have left, we had better stay at home. We shall neither do our work well, nor secure the benefit of the retreat, if we are writing and receiving letters. If we feel that we cannot relax our hold on public life, that it is our duty not to miss seeing the newspapers for one or two days, we had better not go into retreat. We cannot give business there the attention it ought to have, and business with its clatter will interfere with the peace of soul necessary to a retreat.

At the same time, it is well to remember that a work cannot be in a healthy basis which cannot go on without the individual for a single day. And that if our holidays be few, we could not do better than spend a

small portion of them, at all events, in refreshing the soul. We should remember further, that to improve the instrument is to improve the work. That to seek GOD and a closer union with Him, may well ensure on His part a closer supervision of the work from which we are temporarily withdrawn. We may count on the same generous favour which cheered the Jew when he left home to keep the feasts of obligation at Jerusalem—“Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy GOD thrice in the year.” We may go further and say that to many men such times are necessary ; to all they would be beneficial, when in some way or another they can be still and gather up their powers. If our own great General could insist on having his sleep, even in the greatest perils, in order the better to fight his way out of the difficulties which hemmed him in ; if General Gordon could make it a rule that at a certain time the white handkerchief outside his tent should be a sign that he was engaged in a sacred communing

with GOD, which no one must disturb ; so we with our dangers and difficulties which must be met, must feel our need of quiet and times of repose, when we can go in before GOD and replenish the glory, which all too easily melts away in our rough contact with the world.

If, on the other hand, we do not need a Quiet Day or a Retreat, it is useless to force upon ourselves a quiet which can only be unprofitable and irksome. It is needful strenuously to protest against Procrustean methods of orthodoxy, which will stretch everyone to the limits of the same bed. It is needful to protest against the constant addition of tests, to which the bewildered Churchman finds it necessary to subscribe before he can claim the right to be called orthodox. Our aim in these papers is this, to show that excellent and useful as retreats are, they cannot be taken up at word of command or in obedience to an unwritten code of orthodoxy. They must be an answer to a real want, the satisfying of a real need. So that before a man goes into retreat he must first satisfy

himself as to whether he wants it. Has his work been of such a character? Does he need rest, retirement, spiritual recreation? What does he intend to do with such an opportunity when he gets it? Does he know how to employ the time when he is up on the mountain alone with GOD? Does he know what to do in the wilderness, when he measures his strength against the attack of Satan? Will he be dazed on the mount of Transfiguration, or asleep during the crisis of Gethsemane? Has he trained his ears to listen, his eyes to watch, his heart to think, his whole being to pray? As well might an amateur join an expedition of astronomers to a foreign land to study the scientific bearings of an eclipse, as an uninstructed man, with a general sense of its being the right thing to do, go into a Retreat. In one case, as in the other, he is in the way of those who mean serious business; he finds the whole occupation monotonous and dull. He comes back having failed in his object, if he had any. He has been to a Retreat it may be, but without entering into

it ; he has been to a Quiet Day, but in no sense has he been quiet.

We propose in the subsequent chapters to deal with some salient points in a Retreat, and if we have protested against its becoming a fashionable pastime, to show how it can be made a severe, but yet a wholesome exercise.

CHAPTER II.

IN the previous chapter we discussed the *rationale* of the form of devotion which leads devout persons to seek some special blessing from GOD by withdrawing for a period, more or less prolonged, into His immediate Presence. We propose now to examine the arrangement of time which experience has proved to be most profitable to those so engaged: to set forth in theory the retreatants' day. Whether in the Quiet Day or in the more technical Retreat, the spiritual exercises and arrangement of time naturally fall into four divisions:—

Public Devotions ;

The Addresses given by some one person
known as the Conductor of the Retreat ;

The time allotted to private devotion and
reading ;

The spaces assigned to meals and recreation.

As regards devotions, the Holy Communion naturally forms the beginning of a day of spiritual exercises, whether preceded by some subsidiary office or not. And it is a grievous pity and a distinct loss, not only to the individual, but to the whole party gathered together, when either from distance or lack of enterprise, people come in after the Holy Sacrifice has been offered ; thereby depriving themselves of the great spiritual help which a Communion must give to the soul, and missing the bond of a common purpose and a common devotion which comes from the Sacrament of Unity. It would surely be better that those at a distance should come overnight, so as to be ready for the morning Eucharist, or not come at all, rather than mingle among the others as the disciple who, for whatever reason, was not with them when JESUS came.

Matins and Evensong will naturally form

two other important Services in the day of devotion. Loyalty to the Prayer Book would suggest it, and, further, in the quiet and peace of a day of prayer, an opportunity occurs of realizing more fully their deep spiritual and intellectual fulness, and learning more to surround them in the most busy life with that atmosphere of peace which is necessary, if they are to make the voice of their praise to be heard in the din of life ; for "sound requires atmosphere." At the same time it is usually found a good opportunity for bringing out the devotional use of the 119th Psalm, which forms the main burden of the old Hour Services, known as Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, when the heart is better able to appreciate that inspired burst of prayer and praise, which shoots up and falls and rises again, always reaching up in jets of devotion to the level of GOD'S law, commandments, statutes, and testimonies, from which no gust of passion, no weakness of spiritual force can drive the heart away.

After the devotions the most characteristic

feature of the day is the addresses, delivered by one man, bearing on some subject of the spiritual life, or practical piety. And here it is necessary to keep most strongly before us that these are in no sense a series of sermons to be listened to with critical appreciation or intellectual acquiescence ; but suggested lines of thought, and heads of meditation, to be verified afterwards by each individual for himself ; or subjects even to be studied independently if they do not lend themselves to his spiritual bent or natural turn of mind. And it would be well if conductors of Retreats kept this in view, so that instead of seeking to turn out carefully elaborated treatises or rhetorically finished exhortations, they sought more to throw out full, suggestive, yet unfinished, thoughts, carefully arranged towards a definite point, but with the thread laid bare, and the construction purposely left rough for other thoughts from other minds to be built upon them, and so to stimulate independent action.

When the addresses are severally ended the

most important and difficult part of the day of devotion commences ; then each for himself must work out the ideas which have been presented to his mind, bring them before GOD in meditation, and extract from them some practical conclusion bearing on his individual life. Nothing, therefore, can be more hopeless to the conductor, or more profitless to the individual retreatant, than that those who have been listening to the address, and presumably receiving suggestions to guide their devotions, should immediately rise from their knees, leave the Church in order to plunge into desultory conversation, or wander about outside in aimless weariness. Now is the time when each one must realise that after all he is individually managing his own retreat. He will put himself face to face, if possible, with GOD, and either in the quiet of the Church, or in the seclusion of his own room, work out the spiritual problems which have been suggested to him ; making personal what was general, applying to his own needs what was thrown out as suggestions for all,

supplementing, correcting, substituting if necessary, but still following the line indicated by the conductor. To this end it is usual to bring a note-book and pencil, so as to write down during the address, not things which may possibly come in useful for a sermon, but points which come home to the individual soul, points which need following up, points which open out regions of practice which have hitherto been little thought of, but now become more clear under the quiet influence of the Retreat. It is during this interval that the conductor may be seen privately, either for confession, or for spiritual guidance, or as the recipient of a resolution registered in consequence of the Retreat. This is a point which we should like to insist on again and again, that although one man conducts, he does not carry out the Retreat ; that has to be done by the individual members, under the direction only of one whose business it is to shape their thoughts and quicken their prayers, not to think for them, nor pray in their stead.

The address and the subsequent private meditation ended, there comes generally one of the meals, of which one may be taken as a sample of all. Absolute silence from conversation is preserved (the necessity for which we hope to show next time), and during the meal a book is read ; at breakfast generally some book of devotion, even Holy Scripture ; at dinner and supper usually some religious biography. The object of reading, besides the negative advantage of stopping conversation, is to keep up a religious atmosphere, to guard the mind from falling back into its ordinary groove, and to relieve the strain put upon it by long meditation, self-examination, listening to addresses, devotional reading, and the like. It is astonishing to find how smoothly and quietly a large party can partake of their meal by attending a little to their neighbour's wants, and simply taking such things as are set before them.

After the meals, and for a longer period after the mid-day meal, comes the recreation time. It is here especially that the tempta-

tion comes to relax the strictness, and practically to ruin the atmosphere of the Retreat. One or two things must be taken as postulates of a proper Retreat. There must be no breaking of the rule of silence, no splitting up into social groups or smoking parties. To do this is to undo the whole good of the morning's quiet. Neither is the recreation a time for newspapers, the world for the moment is banished. To neglect this is again to disturb the good effect produced, and break down the devotional atmosphere. Neither is it a time for discussion on religious subjects ; discussions, even when they are profitable, are very often disquieting, and responsible for feelings of pride, irritation, envy, party spirit, and the like. At all events, the risk of such a consummation is never far absent. The recreation time is a period for much needed rest, if the day has been spent on its legitimate object. Real prayer is a great effort ; meditation is a mental and spiritual strain ; self-examination and confession leave the soul tired as after a conflict.

Recreation in a Quiet Day is not a luxury but a necessity, but it requires careful management.

Bodily exercise, and bodily rest, of course, must be attended to. But the difficulty will be found in not letting the spiritual faculties run down from the level to which they have been strung, while, at the same time, not putting them to any fresh strain, so as to make them incapable of further effort. It is then that a book of a religious character, the Bible itself, or some book of Christian biography, may well be used as a spiritual relaxation. Or it may be found necessary to have half an hour's complete rest to prepare for the later meditations and spiritual exercises. The day we have sketched is no easy or light thing; and yet the experience of most men who have tried it is that it is easier to enter into a Retreat of two or three days than into a Quiet Day, which lasts only a few hours. One thing, however, is certain, that no one who is not prepared to throw himself absolutely into it, should attempt a devotion

of this kind. A Quiet Day laxly observed is, at the best, a very dull form of a clerical meeting. But a Quiet Day strictly observed is an experience which sheds an influence over the whole year ; and, whatever else it may be, can never be charged with dullness, or accused of monotony.

We hope in the next chapter to offer some remarks on the rule of silence.

CHAPTER III.

ONE of the most characteristic features of these days of devotion, as will be evident from the preceding chapters, will be the silence observed from all sorts of conversation, extending to even a putting aside of newspapers, and the receiving of letters, except such as are of urgent and absolute importance. This rule is of more value than appears at first sight. It is important absolutely in its bearing on the value of the particular retreat to the individual soul. It is important in its bearing on the general comfort of those who form the body of retreatants. But also it is of indirect importance as giving the individual an opportunity of practising self-denial in a region where it is often but little attempted, and as giving him an opportunity of gaining control over a most unruly member—the tongue, which as

S. James tells us no man can tame ; and further, of opening up all those regions of speculative inquiry and spiritual insight which are within reach of those who allow their tongues to give them time to think and their ears to make observations for themselves. "There are many echoes in the world, but not many voices," because so many are catching up secondhand sounds, instead of evolving independent thought.

Now we anticipate an objection at once. The clergy especially are so isolated, and see so few friends, and have so few opportunities of comparing thoughts with others, that it is cruel to forbid that those who fear the LORD should speak often one to another. But it cannot be too often pointed out that "the object of a retreat is not companionship of harmonious minds, or the gain of intelligence through mutual communications and play of thought." If any feels that he requires this sort of companionship, let him carefully avoid a retreat or Quiet Day, and attend instead conferences, lectures, or discussions, of which

there are plenty, and brighten his ideas in intercourse with other minds as much as he may desire. We all know in a concert-room the terrible infliction of a man who has not come to hear music but to talk. We all know in a picture-gallery the intolerable nuisance of the talking amateur, who neither sees nor appreciates art, nor can understand others doing it either. If possible, the man who talks in a retreat is worse ; he is a disturbing element, he lowers the whole tone of the meeting, and prevents the calm hush in which serious thoughts come to the soul, and in which for once as a rare exception the spirit can indulge in the selfish experience—which the noise of the world in its business, its controversies, its pleasures, and its demands, makes impossible—GOD and my own soul. “I will hearken what the LORD GOD will say concerning me.” “Be still, then, and know that I am GOD.” It is easy to see what a gathering of the sort would be without it from the experience of the opening or the concluding meal, when the silence is relaxed, and the hum of conversa-

tion recalls the bewildering buzz of a dinner party or public gathering. Even in a modified form there are grave objections against any sort of conversation, whether serious or otherwise, between friend and friend, inquirer and adviser (excepting, of course, the recognised conductor), or mere casual acquaintances in the ordinary courtesies of life. We live in a controversial age. Is it not only too possible that a chance word on a religious subject may provoke irritation, argument, religious perplexity, a searching about for contentious answers, a complete intellectual disturbance to the peace of mind necessary to study the relations between GOD and the individual soul? Or again, how often it has happened that a word in the vestry before entering on service, or a word in the churchyard before going into church, or a letter read just before prayers, or the placard of a newspaper displayed outside in the street, has started a train of thought which cannot be shaken off all through the service? A gnat of disquiet, a buzzing, teasing insect, has been brought in,

in the clothes, and it is an irritation throughout the day. So a word thoughtlessly spoken in retreat may rouse an apprehension ; a casual remark set a man off thinking ; a suggestion provoke a long mental investigation, in which a man loses himself, only to wake up and find the golden opportunity for service, meditation, or spiritual profit lost. We retain the form of a time of quiet before we commence our prayers in church, as we kneel down in our place. There is a yard of some sort between the religious building and the busy road ; let us keep up the fringe of silence round our retreats and Quiet Days. Long experience shews it to be necessary, if the quiet of the day is to do its work in the soul.

Viewed on the side of the conductor it is absolutely essential. What chance has he of creating any deep impression in the soul if the germs of thought which he has scattered are immediately pounced upon by the birds of frivolous conversation, and swallowed up in talk ? He becomes at once an occupier of an

unenviable rostrum, from which he lectures his brethren, and courts their criticism, instead of acting as their leader, and throwing out thoughts which they can develop and mature. What chance has he of feeling that electric sympathy which, coming out of the deep hush, assures him of the co-operation of other minds, the wrestling of other souls? In vain may we fan the flame of devotion with address, with prayer, with exhortation, it never can mount into a steady flame of earnestness if it is to be subject to violent interruptions and spasmodic gusts and the periodical sinking back into the embers of a fire put out by frivolity, and quenched by chattering.

We have hinted above at deeper reasons still. Everyone has to learn sooner or later the great lesson of silence. Nazareth stands out, illuminated by only one short text, as the prelude to the labour and glory of the Ministry and the Atonement. Each day we live, as we well know, owes its intensity or its vacuity to the presence or absence of its quiet moments. Prayer and devotion are the very motive

power of the day's activity. And before we die, those of us whom GOD rewards with a time in which to prepare, will know that we must take advantage of the silence of our sick bed. How many points of quiet and retirement there are, where men are missing their opportunities, and losing their rich vantage-ground simply because they do not know how to be quiet, and dread being alone. If our retreats taught us nothing else, if they taught us how to be quiet, how to behave when "halted under fire," how to use the moments of withdrawal from active life, and the awful responsibilities of quiet, they would teach us something, nay, be valuable adjuncts to the spiritual life. But when we remember that we have others to consider as well as ourselves, we shall feel that the success of the devotional exercise viewed spiritually, the comfort of our fellow retreatants, the deeper needs of our own soul, all furnish conclusive reasons, that, if we cannot keep silence, if we cannot bear the strain, if we honestly feel it would do us more harm than good (and there are many such

cases), it is better simply to say so, to face our own difficulties and stay at home rather than run any risk of being a disturbing element and ruining a Quiet Day because we do not know how to hold our tongues, and have not learned ourselves to be quiet.

We reprint an extract from the writings of a well-known divine bearing on this subject * :—

“A retreat also has its special object, and that is to give, as far as outward circumstances can further it, an undivided influence favourable to the presentation of unseen and impalpable truths in their bearing on one’s own solitary personal life.

“Its peculiar aim is to correct the consequences of ceaseless converse with the outer world, and to remove the obstructions which other minds and other thoughts present to the full working of the conscience within itself, and thus make the impressions of eternal concerns and verities more vivid and deep than they

* Canon Carter.

can be in social life, causing a more complete realization of what only floats before the soul vaguely in its ordinary state.

“Anyone will perceive how much a return to even serious topics of conversation may interfere with this design, and how impossible it is, where matters of interest, however grave, have been opened, in the quick mutual play of different minds, to prevent conversation becoming so exciting as to occupy, if not absorb, the thoughts, it may be long after the intercourse has ceased.

“Moreover, it is not merely the absence of distraction, but the security against the possibility of such distraction, and the certainty of a safeguard against one's own heedlessness or forgetfulness, which is desired to be maintained, as the point on which so much of the integrity of the concentrated effect of the meditations depends.

“Anyone who attends Retreats may judge of this question for himself, supposing conversation has been allowed only during times of recreation, by comparing his own state of

mind before and after such intercourse has passed. If an agreeable walk with pleasant though becomingly serious talk has followed the afternoon's meditation, there is a sensible relaxation in the tone of mind previously maintained, which is felt to detract from the evening's meditation.

“How frequently have those who feared on entering into a Retreat, regretted the return to the world's converse; and those by whom the restraint was at first felt to be irksome afterwards been thankful for the discipline, and looked back to the unwonted isolation as fraught with something of solemn anticipation of the time when, whether they will or not, they must stand face to face before GOD, when the One Almighty Presence will be all in all to the soul! The danger of an imperfectly-kept Retreat is lest the addresses should prove to be merely a series of sermons, having, indeed, the immediate influence of a moving discourse, but leaving little result. Even if there have been earnest attention to the addresses, the quick return to the ordinary

current of thought during the interval leaves room for only a slight amount of reflection to be followed by little, if any, abiding change in the soul's after-progress.

“The object of a retreat is rather to provide that the idea suggested should, during its progress, grow and accumulate within the soul : and by a combined and concentrated power, as they occupy the whole field of vision, determine and fix the entire bent of the inward life upon a new standard and with fresh energies.

“For this purpose a steadily sustained force of connected thoughts is needed, and time for the development of ideas to form new principles within the soul. It is not uncommonly found that the earlier portion of a retreat is occupied in merely getting rid of previous trains of distracting thought or anxieties, or in freeing the soul from some self-contemplative mood absorbing all power of attention ; and only the latter part felt to be of any benefit, because this alone has been received into the free and unembarrassed mind. What

would be the chance of persons thus pre-occupied profiting by the exercises, if subjected to the yet further inroad of other interests and excitements from the recurrence of intervals of conversation ?”

CHAPTER IV.

IF silence from conversation, and shutting out as far as possible the outside world, is the atmosphere most suitable to a retreat, its most characteristic exercise will be meditation. A man who cannot, or who feels he ought not to keep absolute silence, should on no account go to a Retreat or Quiet Day. A man who has not learned the art of systematic meditation will find himself equally out of place, and the victim of weariness and aimlessness of all kinds, which will make the hours, as they slowly draw themselves out, anything but a time of devotion. We should not recommend a deaf man to attend a concert, nor a blind man to visit a picture-gallery, neither should we advise one who cannot meditate to enter on the strain of a Retreat.

As there is considerable ambiguity of meaning about the terms meditation, and

uncertainty as to its methods, we propose to devote the last article to a simple investigation of the methods and advantages of this exercise ; believing that a fuller acquaintance with its advantages and a more systematic use of its great spiritual help, will more than anything tend to put Retreats and Quiet Days on their proper footing, and lift them up from mere pious gatherings, and the hearing of many sermons, and meditation by proxy, into a truly co-operative method whereby the Retreat becomes the combined action of many doing the same thing, each adding the fervour of his own devotion and the sympathetic power of his own efforts towards the spiritual end up to which he is being led by the conductor.

Most people when they talk of meditation think loosely of Isaac walking about the fields at eventide, or of a leisured person sitting back in his chair to think over a book which he has just laid down ; or even of Tityrus reclining under his wide - spreading beach tree. Whereas meditation is undoubtedly a

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difficult exercise, calling into play all the faculties that are employed in prayer, while making even larger demands upon that one faculty known as the understanding. It will be natural to seek for help in books, and of course considerable aid is to be obtained in this direction. Many people are frightened back altogether by the elaborate system of S. Ignatius Loyola, and the books founded on his directions, but short of these there are some admirable directions in a little book by the late Dr. Liddon, not nearly so well known as it deserves to be, "The Priest in his Inner Life," where the duty, the methods, and the system of meditation, are all set forth at some length. There is also an excellent little book of helps to meditation, by the much-respected vicar of St. Matthew's, Westminster, Rev. W. B. Trevelyan ; while as examples of meditations, and even as the framework of our own, such books as many of Mr. Mortimer's, the Retreat addresses of the Dean of Chichester, or of Canon Carter, will be found useful. But the sooner a man learns to be independent of

helps, and self-sufficient, the better it will be for him ; if he discards books, and props, and helps, and throws himself into deep water and strikes out, believing that thereby he will the sooner learn to swim. Let us imagine the case of a man who has made the determination. First of all, he will have to secure a time free from interruption ; about this he must be resolute, as resolute as people are after all about their dinner hour, or as resolute as any man of business, who in view of work to be done causes it to be understood that he must be interrupted on no pretence whatsoever in business hours. Then the proper length of time must be secured by the watch, whatever period we fix being scrupulously adhered to, so as not to leave room for a fickle inclination, or the faithlessness of a passing disinclination.

Next comes the choice of subject. And can we do better than take the Bible ? Some one book of it, which we will go through verse by verse, or paragraph by paragraph ? It has the advantage of being inspired, that is to

say, we know it is all auriferous, and has a treasure to yield up if we can get at it by patient toil. Taking it in this way, our verse for meditation comes to us each day like a message from on high, "This is GOD's message to me to-day, 'I will hearken what the LORD GOD will say concerning me.'"

It will also save us the difficulty of choosing : it will prevent our hovering over favourite texts ; it will enable us to see that all Holy Scripture is written for our learning, and that even the Queen of Sheba, and the ox treading out the corn are worthy of careful study, and have lessons for Christians. Then we put ourselves in the Presence of GOD, we kneel down, we pray for the guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT, using the *Veni Creator* ; or other suitable prayer ; and we take our verse, either we have looked over it the night before, and have marked certain tracts of investigation, or we let it come upon us, as a surprise at the moment, as the voice of GOD. And now our hard work begins ; the faculties are all ready, we are quiet, removed

from distraction, and GOD is there. Let us suppose, for example, that our text for meditation is the first verse of the fourth chapter of St. Matthew, "Then was JESUS led up of the SPIRIT into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." The first word that strikes us is "*then*." When? After His baptism, after the felt consolation and power of heavenly manifestations. Have we here a law, that times of great spiritual blessing are often followed by times of great distress and temptation? We look back at Confirmation, previous Communion, past retreats, etc., and see whether or not this is so. After thinking this out our thoughts are gathered up into some such conclusions as this. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall ;" and we pray to GOD, Who is before us, that we may be able to stand the sudden changes of climate so trying to the soul. Then we go on to notice another single word which strikes us, it is "*Jesus*." Then if the sinless GOD was tempted, we must expect to be ; there is no exemption. If JESUS means

SAVIOUR, perhaps these are the very souls against whom Satan launches his fiercest assaults. We are led on carefully to distinguish between temptation and sin, and to ask GOD present before us to help us not to be discouraged, and to know that we never shall be tempted above that we are able. We go on to notice the next words, "*led up of the Spirit.*" Our intellect has to be summoned here, perhaps a commentary brought in to know whether it means the faculty known as the spirit, or the HOLY SPIRIT ; we decide for the latter, and we think it out until we reach S. James' saying, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." And we pray GOD when He puts us under fire to give us grace to gain our crown. We next note "*in the wilderness,*" and we at once see that no place is exempt from temptation ; that the wilderness may be the best place to meet it ; we see that it may be necessary even to make a wilderness round our life in order to meet temptation, until we lead up to

the petition of the collect of the first Sunday in Lent. And our last point is "*the devil*," where we pause to think of the significance of his titles as indicating his nature and the hardness of the struggle. While out of it all we gather what St. Francis of Sales once called a spiritual bouquet, a resolution, a flower of sanctity whose fragrance stays with us all day. "Whensoever I call upon Thee, then shall mine enemies be put to flight: This I know for GOD is on my side."

The above example may serve to show what a help meditation in Holy Scripture would be to us; how it would give us a grasp on its meaning, and insight into its truths, and equally would help us in retreat when we listen to the addresses to be able to take down in our notes salient points which we could work out for ourselves, and assimilate into our own life, and make out of them a real spiritual storehouse of good resolutions.

We hope we have said enough to establish these three points. That no one should be driven into a Retreat from the idea that to

do without them is to convict oneself of low spiritual attainments. Secondly, that no one should enter into a Retreat or Quiet Day who has not learned the elementary requirement of keeping silence. And that, thirdly, meditation should be practised daily, and considerable proficiency be attained in it before one enters on a devotion where it plays such a prominent part, and which without it is wearisome, unprofitable, and useless.



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